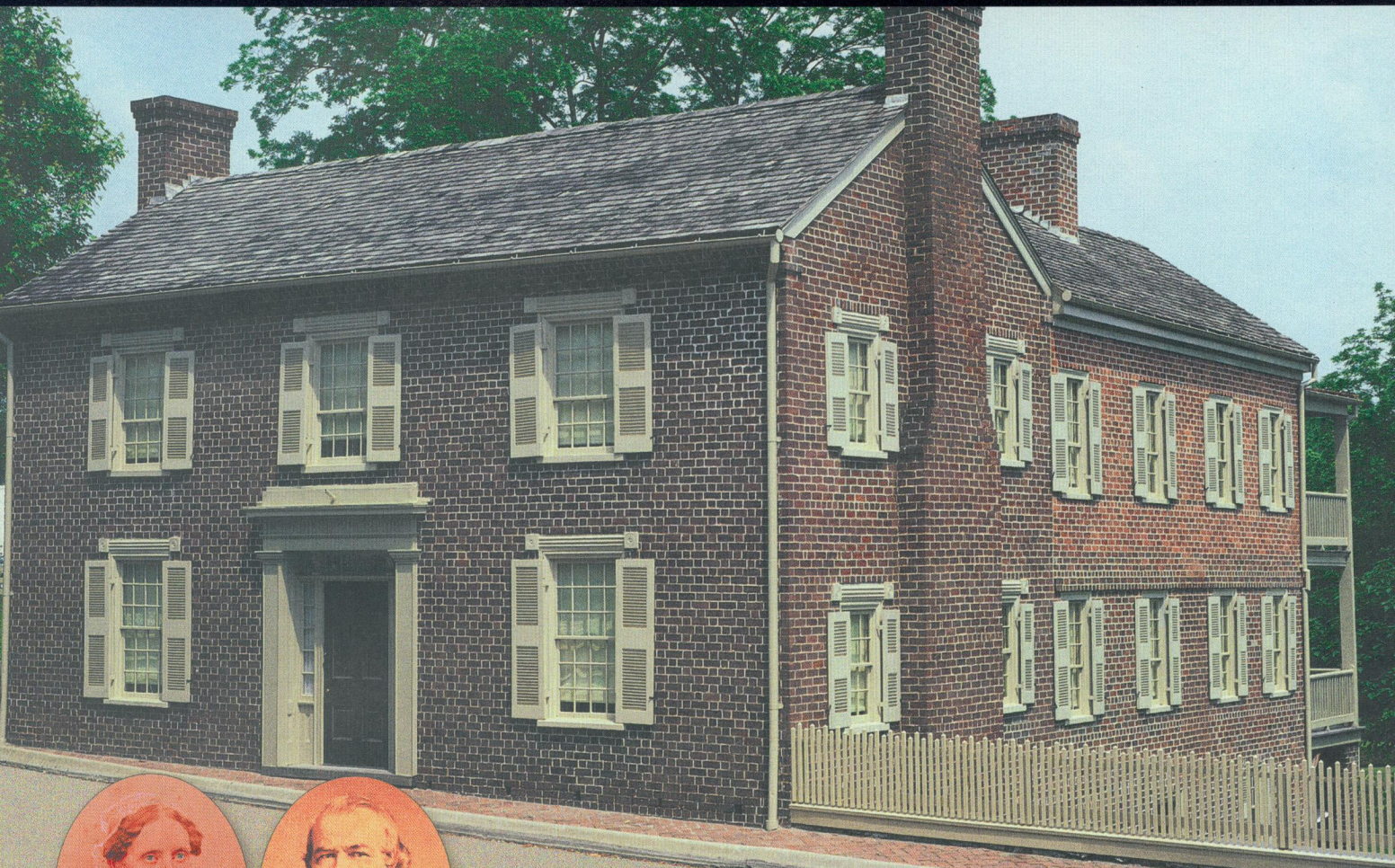


Andrew Johnson

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historic Site
Tennessee



Photos above and left—National Park Service



Eliza McCordle Johnson and Andrew Johnson

work." Andrew Johnson never lost an opportunity to remind people of his humble origins. He cited his own rise from poverty as proof that prosperity was not exclusively for the elite. Johnson was born in 1808 in Raleigh, North Carolina. His father, a hotel porter, died when Andrew was four. Apprenticed to a tailor as a child, he ran away when he was 15 and traveled throughout the Carolinas and Tennessee. Eventually he settled in Greeneville, Tennessee, a prosperous Scotch-Irish town. Here he met Eliza McCordle, the daughter of a shoemaker. The two were married in 1827 in a ceremony performed by Mordecai Lincoln, a cousin of Abraham Lincoln.

There is a persistent story that Eliza taught her husband to read. He actually received some education as an apprentice tailor in Raleigh. It was the custom for employers to hire readers for the boys as they worked. Young Andrew asked for books and taught himself as much as he could. He hired readers at his own tailor shop in Greeneville. Eliza taught him writing and mathematics, and he joined debating clubs. Though he never attended school, Johnson was always a strong proponent of public education. It was a love for words and a recognition of their power that helped him to succeed. Johnson launched his career in his tailor shop, cultivating a commanding style of speech and participating in debates that were as much entertainment as politics in 19th-century rural America. "There was no hurried utterance," wrote an opponent. "He held his crowd spellbound."

State offices (see *chronology on the other side of this brochure*) took him to Nashville for long months while his family remained in Greeneville. With almost no time to devote to tailoring, he eventually sold his business but kept the building and lot. In 1851 the family moved from the small brick house Johnson bought in the 1830s to a larger house—the Homestead. By the 1840s he owned a 350-acre farm east of town, along with flour mills and town lots. "There is no use in buying property," he told his son Robert, "unless there is a bargain in it."

"When I was a tailor," President Andrew Johnson told a crowd of supporters in 1866, "I always made a close fit and was always punctual to my customers, and did good

War brought hardship for the Johnsons. Although the state was under Union rule by 1862—Johnson became military governor—pro-Union East Tennessee was still occupied by the Confederates. Johnson's sons and sons-in-law were harassed for their Union stand. His property was confiscated and his house turned into a hospital. Eliza finally managed to escape through enemy lines to join her husband in Nashville. The family did not return home until Johnson's presidential term ended in 1869.

By then Johnson was the wealthiest citizen of Greeneville. A newspaper article described his business sense as "above the average for public men, for in his investments and business relations he manifests considerable shrewdness and tact." Johnson died in 1875 with an estate surpassing \$200,000; Eliza died six months later. The Homestead passed to their youngest son, Andrew Jr. Greeneville citizens dedicated the cemetery monument to their beloved statesman in 1878. One by one the Johnson shop and houses were acquired by the Federal Government. Today the buildings and cemetery commemorate the life and work of a man who assumed the presidency during a time of crisis and helped to restore the Union.



The Johnson tailor shop (above) was the center for local politics. The Johnsons moved from a smaller house to the Homestead (top) in the 1830s.